

NOTEBOOKS

INTRODUCTION

With notebooks getting cheaper every day, you can now buy a decent budget laptop for as little as £600 including VAT. This kind of notebook is perfectly suitable for day-to-day tasks such as surfing the web and writing office documents. However, if you try using one for rather more demanding tasks, you're likely to be disappointed. Fortunately, you don't have to pay much more to get a very powerful notebook. Less than £900 will buy you a dual-core computer with loads of memory that's ready to edit video files, play games or record TV programmes. A large hard disk inside enables you to store loads of media files, and a big widescreen display makes every task look good.

This month we've tested nine notebooks that are very powerful but still great value. Whether you want to watch TV, play games, edit video or just work on PowerPoint, we'll help you choose the perfect computer.

Seth Barton

Notebooks and video expert

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BEST-EVER NOTEBOOKS

A budget of £800 can take you a long way if you're after a notebook with staying power. We review nine star performers that can fulfil a diverse range of tasks and provide the very best specifications for your cash

Choosing a... Notebook

When spending this much on a notebook, you shouldn't have to make any significant compromises. That said, the nine notebooks here all have different strengths that make them particularly suitable for different types of users. Follow our guide, and you'll get a great notebook that's perfect for the way you work.

SIZE OF RELIEF

Just because a notebook is powerful doesn't mean it has to be huge. The notebooks in this group can be divided into three size categories based on the type of screen they use.

Rock's Pegasus is the smallest notebook in the group. Its 13.3in display is fitted in a chassis with a footprint the same size as a sheet of A4. Five of the notebooks use standard 15.4in displays. This makes for a good balance between portability and a big screen, and provides plenty of space for a big keyboard. Finally, there are three 17in desktop replacement notebooks. You wouldn't want to carry one around often, but the large display gives you more room in which to work.

The native resolution of a notebook's display dictates the size of your Windows desktop. The 13.3in and 15.4in displays all have a native resolution of

1,280x800 pixels. This is sufficient for most tasks, but you may find complex applications such as video-editing programs easily fill this space with toolbars. The 17in displays have a higher resolution of 1,440x900 pixels, making them better suited to these tasks.

There can be significant differences in the quality of notebook displays. Some have a permanent colour cast, while others look grainy. Uneven backlighting can be particularly annoying. Our reviews explain which screens are crystal clear and which leave you squinting.

POWER PLAY

If you have tough tasks to complete, you want a notebook that's as fast as possible. All the notebooks here have dual-core processors so they can run multi-core aware applications, such as our video benchmark, very quickly. Each one has at least 1GB of memory, so memory-hungry tasks such as our image and multi-application benchmarks run smoothly. The fastest notebooks here are those made by PC Nextday, Hi-Grade and NEC, all of which use a 2.0GHz Intel Core 2 Duo T7200 processor. But even the slowest notebooks here are speedy in comparison to most cheaper models.

If you want to play 3D games, a fast 3D graphics chip is just as important as a powerful processor. There



This month

ACER
Aspire 9423WSMi
Page 71



EVESHAM
Quest A425
Page 71



HI-GRADE
Ultinote A9900-7200
Page 71



MSI
Megabook M667-023UK
Page 73



NEC
Versa M360
Page 73



PC NEXTDAY
Zoostorm 53-7701 Family Laptop
Page 73



ROCK
Pegasus 335 T5600
Page 74



SONY
Vaio N21M/W
Page 74



TOSHIBA
Satellite A100
Page 74



are three different 3D chips used in this group. The Nvidia GeForce Go 7600 chipset seen in the Evesham and MSI is the quickest. If you play games only occasionally, the ATI Radeon Mobility X1600 chipset used in the PC Nextday and Hi-Grade notebooks should suffice.

All the notebooks here, except for the NEC Versa, use the new Windows Vista Home Premium operating system. This includes the new 3D Windows Aero interface, improved file searching and better security. Vista requires more power to run than Windows XP, but the notebooks in this group are fast enough to run it smoothly. The Aero interface works in 3D but it isn't terribly demanding, so even the integrated graphics chips in the Rock and Sony notebooks can run it without problems.

LOST IN SPACE

Windows Vista Home Premium takes up over 10GB of hard disk space, so it's a good thing all the notebooks in this group have large hard disks. The smallest hold 80GB of data, which is fine for office documents and a small music collection, and PC Nextday's enormous 160GB hard disk will hold hours of recorded TV. If your hard disk fills up, you can store some files on a DVD. Single-layer DVDs can be bought in bulk for as little as 12p and hold several gigabytes of data. All the notebooks here have DVD writers that support many disc formats and write discs quickly.

However great the components inside your notebook are, you'll need a good keyboard and touch pad to make the most of them. A bad keyboard can frustrate touch-typists, and a poor touch pad can make everyday computing a chore. Our reviews explain which notebooks are a pleasure to use and which are a pain.

It's easy to overlook the ports you get when buying a notebook, but it's a lot easier to upgrade a notebook's memory than add a DVI port. Fortunately, most devices plug into a standard USB port, and most notebooks here

have plenty of these. Only Sony and Rock have equipped their notebooks with fewer than four USB ports, so gadget fans should view these with caution.

CARE IN THE COMMUNITY

Your new notebook should work perfectly for many years, but faults occur occasionally, so it's worth getting a good warranty. Evesham's warranty includes onsite cover, so your computer will be fixed in your home, and Hi-Grade even covers accidental damage.

Pause for reflection Gloss v matt screens



Glossy LCD screens make movies look great, but they suffer from distracting reflections under office lighting (right). NEC's Versa has a matt screen that minimises this problem (left)



ACER Aspire 9423WSMi

★★★★

£800 inc VAT

This slim desktop replacement notebook comes with Windows Vista Home Premium installed.

FEATURES

Windows Vista Home Premium includes Media Center. This means you get a streamlined media-browsing interface and an excellent TV electronic programme guide (EPG), although with no tuner the latter is of little use.

A 17in display is perfect for watching DVDs or looking at photos. The associated native resolution of 1,440x900 pixels provides plenty of space to work with. Unfortunately, Acer's screen has a grainy finish that detracts from fine detail. It's not the brightest display here, and the backlighting is uneven around its edges.

The big chassis means there's space for a number pad. All the keys are well sized, but they provide little tactile feedback, and the keyboard flexes slightly. The touch pad is big, accurate and has pleasantly clicky buttons.

Inside, there's a big 120GB hard disk for storing media files. There are four USB ports, Bluetooth, Gigabit Ethernet and a memory card reader, but no FireWire ports.

PERFORMANCE

The Aspire 9423WSMi uses an Intel Core 2 Duo T5500 processor and produced a score of 130 overall in our application benchmarks. This is a little below average for the group. It has 1GB of RAM inside, though, so it can handle memory-intensive tasks such as video editing.

The Nvidia GeForce 7300 graphics chipset has only 64MB of dedicated video memory, but it can also borrow some of the system's main memory when needed. It's not very quick and it produced just 4.9fps in our Doom 3 test. Those who want to play games should look elsewhere. It's not ideal for travellers as the battery lasted less than two-and-a-half hours.

VERDICT

This is a decent notebook, but it doesn't shine in any area. If you want a desktop replacement notebook, you're better off with the Zoostorm.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Big hard disk; plenty of ports
- ✗ Unsuitable for gaming
- ✗ Poor battery life; grainy display

DESKTOP-REPLACEMENT NOTEBOOK Intel Core 2 Duo T5500, 1GB RAM, 120GB disk, Nvidia GeForce Go 7300 graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 17in widescreen LCD, 3.7kg
PART CODE LX.AWZ0X.058
SUPPLIER www.laptopsdirect.co.uk
DETAILS www.acer.co.uk



EVESHAM Quest A425

★★★★

£881 inc VAT

The Quest A425 has a powerful 3D graphics chipset, so you can play the latest games.

FEATURES

The Windows Vista Home Premium operating system looks great. Unfortunately, the Quest's silvery-grey chassis looks dull by comparison. It has plenty of ports, though, with four USB ports, a Gigabit Ethernet socket, two expansion card slots and a memory card reader.

The 15.4in display has good backlighting, so it can produce an even white screen. It has good viewing angles, too. It's not the brightest in the group, but unlike some it doesn't suffer from distracting graininess. It's one of the better displays in this Labs.

Inside the notebook is a 100GB hard disk and a DVD writer. Evesham provides an outstanding warranty that includes three years of cover with the first two as onsite service.

PERFORMANCE

The Quest A425 has 2GB of RAM installed, so you should be able to run demanding applications without trouble. Unfortunately, its AMD Turion 64 X2 TL-56 processor isn't as quick as the Intel Core 2 Duo chips used in many notebooks here. An overall score of 121 in our application benchmarks shows that this is one of the slower notebooks in the group.

It's no slouch in 3D, though. The Quest ran our Doom 3 test at 44.6fps, making it one of the best notebooks here for gaming. It's capable of running the latest games, if not at the highest detail settings. Unfortunately, the Quest's battery lasted for just one hour and 36 minutes. It's suitable only for use around the home or the office, and even then you'll want to stay near a power socket.

VERDICT

The Quest has more memory and a better warranty than the similar MSI notebook, but it costs more and has a shorter battery life. It's marginally the best notebook here for gamers, but a poor choice for other users.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Good for games; lots of memory
- ✓ Good display; plenty of ports
- ✗ Slow in applications; poor battery life

GENERAL-PURPOSE NOTEBOOK AMD Turion 64 X2 TL-56, 2GB RAM, 100GB disk, Nvidia GeForce Go 7600 graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 15.4in widescreen LCD, 2.9kg
PART CODE 726COSH
SUPPLIER Evesham 08701 609500
DETAILS www.evesham.com



HI-GRADE Ultinote A9900-7200

★★★★★

£881 inc VAT

The A9900-7200's big display makes the most of the Windows Vista Media Center interface.

FEATURES

The 17in screen's native resolution of 1,440x900 pixels gives you roughly the same amount of desktop space as a 17in or 19in desktop monitor. The display isn't very bright, though, and there is a little graininess. Its vertical viewing angles are limited, so you must adjust the screen carefully when you sit down.

The speakers below the display are loud and clear, and the subwoofer adds a touch of bass. There's an optical S/PDIF output on the front, so you can connect to a surround-sound amplifier or speaker set. All the other ports you'll need are present, including four USB ports, FireWire and a memory card reader.

The 100GB hard disk should be big enough for most users, but those with lots of data to store should go for the similar PC Nextday notebook with its 160GB drive.

PERFORMANCE

The Ultinote has a fast 2.0GHz Intel Core 2 Duo T7200 processor. This made it the second-fastest model in the group, scoring well in all the benchmarks and producing an overall score of 154. It was beaten only by the PC Nextday notebook, which uses the same processor.

The ATI Radeon Mobility X1600 graphics chip has been around for a while now, and although it's fast enough to run modern games you'll need to sacrifice resolution and detail settings to get a smooth frame rate. It managed our Doom 3 test at 26.3fps. You won't want to carry this notebook far, but its battery runs for just over two-and-a-half hours.

VERDICT

The Ultinote is fast with dedicated graphics and plenty of ports, but PC Nextday's nearly identical Zoostorm has more memory and a bigger hard disk, so it is a better buy.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Fast in applications; plenty of ports
- ✓ Accidental damage warranty
- ✗ Grainy display

DESKTOP-REPLACEMENT NOTEBOOK Intel Core 2 Duo T7200, 1GB RAM, 100GB disk, ATI Mobility Radeon X1600 graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 17in widescreen LCD, 3.6kg
PART CODE A9900-7200
SUPPLIER Hi-Grade 020 8532 6112
DETAILS www.higrade.com



MSI Megabook M667-023UK

★★★★

£829 inc VAT

The Megabook M667-023UK looks different from Evesham's Quest, but they're built using variants of the same chassis.

FEATURES

The Megabook's number pad is useful, but fitting in these extra buttons has left the other keys far smaller than we'd like. This can make typing a fiddly affair and the spongy key action doesn't help. The touch pad is accurate, however, and its buttons have a pleasing click.

The ports around the side of the case are identical in number and placement to those on the Evesham Quest. This is no bad thing, as both notebooks have every connection you could want bar an optical S/PDIF output. The USB ports are thoughtfully divided with two on each side. Inside, there's a big 120GB hard disk.

The Megabook's display is identical to the Quest's and performs well with both HD video and games. There's no unsightly motion blur and colours appear vibrant. The speakers are loud and quite crisp, but produce little bass.

PERFORMANCE

The Megabook has a larger battery than the Quest, extending 20mm from the rear. It lasted a more respectable two hours and 24 minutes in our tests, but there are better notebooks here for working on the move.

Using the same processor as the Quest A425, but less memory, the Megabook produced a slightly lower overall score of 117 in our benchmarks. This is the lowest score in the group, but the Megabook is still capable of running demanding applications and ran Doom 3 at a smooth 44.4fps.

VERDICT

If you want a notebook that can play the latest games without spending a fortune, it's hard to choose between this and the Evesham Quest. It's close, but with more memory and a better keyboard the Quest just edges ahead.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Good for games; big hard disk
- ✓ Good display; plenty of ports
- ✗ Slow in applications

GENERAL-PURPOSE NOTEBOOK AMD Turion 64 X2 TL-56, 1GB RAM, 120GB disk, Nvidia GeForce Go 7600 graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 15.4in widescreen LCD, 2.9kg
PART CODE M667-023UK
SUPPLIER Mesh 08700 464747
DETAILS www.meshcomputers.com



NEC Versa M360

★★★★★

£775 inc VAT

The Versa M360 uses Windows XP Professional Edition rather than Vista, but it's a good choice if you want a notebook for office use.

FEATURES

The Versa's 15.4in display has a native resolution of 1,280x800, which is easily sufficient for office tasks. It's quite bright, but our white screen test showed a slightly greenish tinge. It has wide viewing angles, however, and its backlighting is even. The display has an anti-glare finish rather than the more common glossy type, so you can use it in any lighting conditions without reflections.

The keyboard has a number pad, but unlike MSI's Megabook the other keys haven't been squashed to compensate. The keys have a decent amount of travel and feedback, so frequent typists will be happy. The touch pad works well and there's even a handy scroll control between the two buttons.

All the essential ports are provided, with four USB ports. There's no FireWire or optical S/PDIF output, though. The 80GB hard disk is the smallest here, but is sufficient for office users. A DVD writer is also fitted.

PERFORMANCE

The Versa's Intel Core 2 Duo T7200 processor runs at a quick 2GHz. With 1GB of memory inside, it produced an impressive score of 151 in our application benchmarks. It's a powerful notebook, easily capable of taking on far harder tasks than day-to-day office applications.

The integrated graphics chipset couldn't run our Doom 3 benchmark, however. Gamers should consider the notebooks from MSI or Evesham instead. The Versa's battery ran for over three-and-a-half hours in our test, making it good enough for regular mobile use.

VERDICT

The Versa doesn't have much to offer home users who want to be entertained, but with a superior keyboard and battery it's an ideal tool for working on office documents.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Fast in applications; cheap
- ✓ Good display; good battery life
- ✗ Unsuitable for games; small hard disk

GENERAL-PURPOSE NOTEBOOK Intel Core 2 Duo T7200, 1GB RAM, 80GB disk, Intel Graphics Media Accelerator 950 graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 15.4in widescreen LCD, 2.8kg
PART CODE NNAG1701101
SUPPLIER Misco 0800 038 8880
DETAILS www.nec.co.uk



PC NEXTDAY Zoostorm 53-7701 Family Laptop

★★★★★

£881 inc VAT



Bar the badge, this notebook appears identical to Hi-Grade's Ultinote. Inside, though, there are some significant differences.

FEATURES

PC Nextday has included a Freeview TV tuner. This works with Windows Vista Home Premium's excellent Media Center software. You can watch live Freeview broadcasts, as well as pause and rewind them. There's a Sky+ style timeline programme guide, too, which is an excellent addition.

TV recordings using Media Center eat up around 1.5GB of disk space per hour. Fortunately, the Zoostorm comes with a huge 160GB hard disk as well. You can also archive programmes to disc using the DVD writer.

The Zoostorm Family Laptop has the same large 17in display as the Ultinote. It isn't particularly bright and it suffers from a slight graininess. The keyboard has a number pad alongside it. The keys are a decent size, but they're a little soft and could do with more feedback. The touchpad is big and accurate, but its buttons could do with more tactile feedback when clicked.

PERFORMANCE

The Zoostorm uses the same fast 2.0GHz Intel Core 2 Duo T7200 processor as the Ultinote. It has twice as much memory, though, so it is faster. Its overall score of 160 is the best here.

The Zoostorm's 3D graphics chipset is identical to that of the Ultinote and it produced a near-identical 26.2fps in our Doom 3 test. Its battery ran for just over two-and-a-half hours in our test.

VERDICT

The Zoostorm's display is a little grainy, but it's a great desktop-replacement notebook. Unless your main priority is portability or 3D gaming, this is by far the best choice.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Fast in applications; lots of memory
- ✓ Plenty of ports; built-in TV tuner; big hard disk
- ✗ Grainy display

DESKTOP-REPLACEMENT NOTEBOOK Intel Core 2 Duo T7200, 2GB RAM, 160GB disk, ATI Mobility Radeon X1600 graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 17in widescreen LCD, 3.6kg
PART CODE 3353-7701
SUPPLIER sales@pcnextday.co.uk
DETAILS www.pcnextday.co.uk



ROCK Pegasus 335 T5600

★★★★★

£858 inc VAT

Rock's Pegasus 335 T5600 has a small display and is fairly portable.

FEATURES

The display measures 13.3in diagonally. This is small enough to make the notebook quite portable, but big enough to support a native resolution of 1,280x800 without straining your eyes. Its image quality is among the best here, and it passed all our tests without difficulty.

The keyboard is a decent size. All the keys are large enough and it's comfortable to type on, but the keys could be slightly deeper. The touch pad is accurate, though the buttons could do with some more feedback.

The Pegasus has all the sockets you'll need, but only three USB ports. One of these provides power even if the notebook is switched off, making it ideal for charging your iPod. The speakers sound rather muffled, so you'll need an external set or headphones to enjoy music on this notebook.

A USB digital TV tuner is included, but it doesn't work with Vista's Media Center. Instead, you'll have to use the less slick software provided. The 80GB hard disk will fill up quickly if you regularly record TV shows.

PERFORMANCE

The Pegasus's Intel Core 2 Duo T5600 processor runs at a quick 1.83GHz and it produced a respectable overall score of 141.

There's no dedicated 3D graphics chip, however, and the integrated graphics system couldn't run our Doom 3 benchmark. The battery is disappointing and ran for only two hours and 14 minutes in our test. This isn't sufficient for regular working on the move and restricts its service as a portable notebook.

VERDICT

Rock's Pegasus is a compact notebook with a nice display. Unfortunately, its poor battery limits its usefulness as a portable notebook.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Good display; easily portable
- ✓ TV tuner included
- ✗ Small hard disk; poor battery life

GENERAL-PURPOSE NOTEBOOK Intel Core 2 Duo T5600, 1GB RAM, 80GB disk, Intel Graphics Media Accelerator 950 graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 13.3in widescreen LCD, 2.2kg
PART CODE Pegasus 335 T56 CS
SUPPLIER Rock 08456 880556
DETAILS www.rockdirect.com



SONY Vaio N21M/W

★★★★★

£799 inc VAT

Sony's Vaio N21M/W's retro design may appeal to some users, but to us it resembles a big silver and white brick.

FEATURES

Despite its sturdy appearance, the Vaio's plastic chassis feels a bit creaky when handled. There's also a shortage of ports around the edges, with just two USB ports provided. Unusually, it has two memory card readers: one for Sony Memory stick (MS) formats and one for Secure Digital (SD) cards. It has just one small ExpressCard/34 expansion slot.

The display is bright with even backlighting and good viewing angles. Our white screen test showed up a slight bluish tinge, but greyscales and colour wheels were displayed well. There's a D-sub output, but no other video outputs for connecting to a TV.

The speakers are on the underside of the notebook. They sound tinny and muffled, and aren't very loud at the maximum volume. The touch pad is a bit too sensitive, making it hard to be precise, but reducing the sensitivity in Windows leaves it feeling sluggish. The keyboard is far better. Its large keys are responsive and have a good depth of travel.

PERFORMANCE

The Vaio N21M/W is the only notebook in this group that uses an older Intel Core Duo processor. The Intel Core Duo T2350 runs at a quick 1.86GHz, but has a slower frontside bus speed than newer Intel Core 2 Duo chips. It produced an overall score of 121, making this the second-slowest notebook in the group. The integrated graphics chipset couldn't run our Doom 3 gaming benchmark.

However, the battery lasted an impressive three hours and 45 minutes in our light-usage test. This is the best battery life in the group.

VERDICT

The Vaio has a nice display and a good battery life, but it's slow in Windows and it could do with more ports.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Good display; great battery life
- ✗ Slow in applications; few ports
- ✗ Unsuitable for games

GENERAL-PURPOSE NOTEBOOK Intel Core Duo T2350, 1GB RAM, 100GB disk, Intel Graphics Media Accelerator 950 graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 15.4in widescreen LCD, 2.9kg
PART CODE N21M/W
SUPPLIER www.currys.co.uk
DETAILS <http://vaio.sony-europe.com>



TOSHIBA Satellite A100

★★★★★

£800 inc VAT

Though not particularly fast, the Satellite A100 is a well-designed notebook that will satisfy most users' needs.

FEATURES

The Satellite's curvy silver chassis was popular with our team, and weighs just 2.7kg. The touch pad could be bigger, but it is accurate. The keyboard is slightly offset to the right because media short-cut buttons have been fitted to the side. These are handy for use with Windows Vista's Media Center.

The Satellite's speakers are easily the best in the group and sound clear and well balanced. They're also quite loud, and there's a handy dial on the front of the notebook to control the volume. A useful switch on the right-hand side lets you disable the wireless network adaptor. There are four USB ports, along with FireWire and a memory card reader.

The display isn't the brightest in the group, but it has plenty of contrast and text looks crisp. Its backlighting is even, there's no graininess and its viewing angles are wide. It displayed our greyscale and colour wheel tests accurately. Inside, the 120GB hard disk provides plenty of storage for media files.

PERFORMANCE

The A100's Intel Core 2 Duo T5500 processor is identical to the one used in Acer's Aspire, and it produced a similar overall score of 134. With 2GB of memory inside, it performed better in the memory-intensive image and multi-application benchmarks.

The Satellite's Nvidia GeForce Go 7300 graphics chipset isn't capable of playing the latest games and ran our Doom 3 test at just 4.8fps. Its battery is better, though, and ran for almost three hours in our light-usage test.

VERDICT

The A100 has a good display, great speakers, lots of memory and a good keyboard. It's not quite as good as the Zoostorm, but if you don't want a 17in display this is the one to buy.

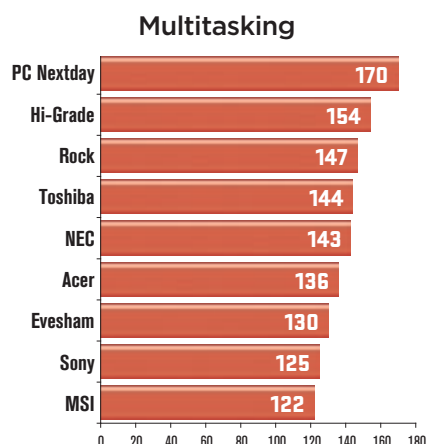
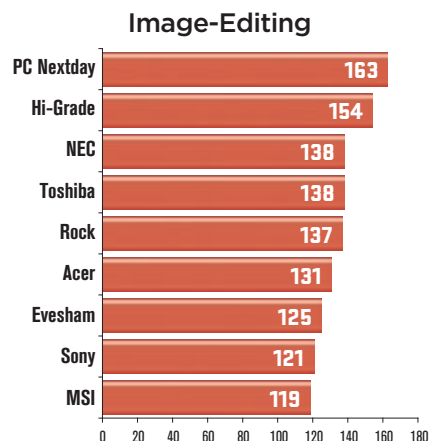
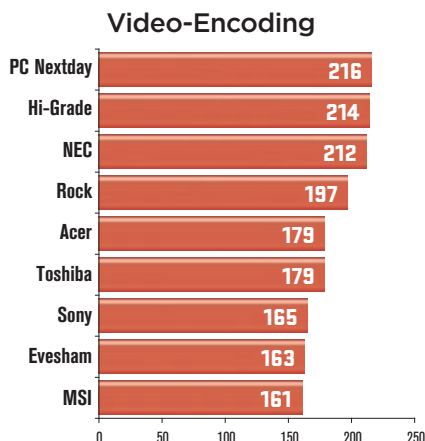
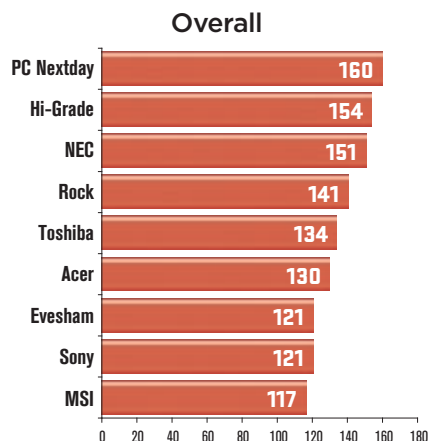
SUMMARY

- ✓ Big hard disk; good display; lots of memory
- ✓ Plenty of ports; good battery life
- ✗ Unsuitable for games

GENERAL-PURPOSE NOTEBOOK Intel Core 2 Duo T5500, 2GB RAM, 120GB disk, Nvidia GeForce Go 7300 graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 15.4in widescreen LCD, 2.7kg
PART CODE PSAARE-03G00JEN
SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.computers.toshiba.co.uk

BENCHMARKS

2D Performance Shopper application tests



Computer Shopper's 2D benchmarks are designed to show how PCs stand up to the toughest tasks Windows can throw at them. Today's PCs have no problem running office applications such as Word and Excel, so we have chosen to focus our tests on areas where you could experience difficulties.

In the new version, there are four scripts. Encoding a short video to MPEG2 format is an extremely processor-intensive task that anyone interested in transferring home videos to DVD will have to tackle. Our image-editing test simulates a session of photo enhancement using Paint Shop Pro X, culminating with the composition of a panorama from a set of digital snaps. In our third test, a set of audio files is ripped to MP3 format. Finally, we have a multi-tasking test designed to

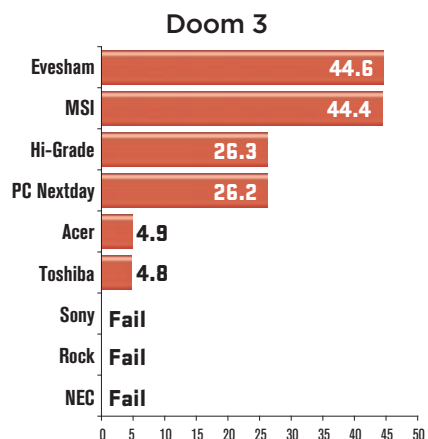


SETTINGS We run our application tests at the notebook's native resolution in 32-bit colour
WEB www.computershopper.co.uk

test the real-life benefits of Hyper-Threaded and dual-core processors. This test compresses a DVD for playback on a Pocket PC at the same time as running our image-editing test.

Figures are relative to a reference Evesham Athlon 64 3500+, which scores 100 in all tests.

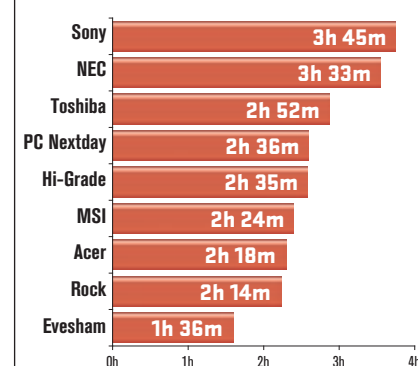
3D Performance Doom 3



SETTINGS 1,024x768 resolution, high quality, 4x AA **WEB** www.doom3.com

Our Doom 3 benchmark tests whether a PC has the power needed to play cutting-edge 3D games with ease. We've made the standard test harder, by including more outdoor scenes in it. A good score here indicates that a PC should cope with any graphically intense 3D game coming on to the market today.

Battery life Run time



Our battery test involves light browser use with the display at its middle brightness setting.

Labs verdict Best-ever notebooks

All the notebooks in this group test are fast enough to take on tough computing tasks and all are reasonably good value. Some stand out as particularly good, however.

PC Nextday's Zoostorm Family Laptop is a very impressive desktop-replacement notebook. With a fast processor and plenty of memory, it produced a huge score in our application benchmarks. It also has a big hard

disk, a Freeview TV tuner and Media Center, so it's a complete personal video recorder. It's excellent value and our Best Buy.

For working, NEC's Versa M360 is the one to pick. With a good keyboard and battery, it's an inexpensive but powerful business notebook. Gamers should go for Evesham's Quest A425, which has a powerful 3D card. Finally, Toshiba's Satellite A100 is an impressive

PC NEXTDAY



Zoostorm 53-7701 Family Laptop

★★★★★



all-rounder. It's not quite as good value as the Zoostorm, but it's a fine alternative if you want something a little smaller. **CS**

MANUFACTURER	ACER	EVESHAM	HI-GRADE	MSI
Model	Aspire 9423WSMi	Quest A425	Ultinote A9900-7200	Megabook M667-023UK
Rating	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★
Processor	Intel Core 2 Duo T5500	AMD Turion 64 X2 TL-56	Intel Core 2 Duo T7200	AMD Turion 64 X2 TL-56
Speed	1.66GHz	1.8GHz	2GHz	1.8GHz
Memory installed	1GB	2GB	1GB	1GB
Memory slots (free)	2 (1)	2 (0)	2 (0)	2 (0)
Max memory	4GB	2GB	2GB	2GB
BIOS	Phoenix	AMI	Insyde	AMI
Dimensions (HxWxD)	38x400x295mm	33x358x259mm	37x393x280mm	33x357x276mm
Weight	3.7kg	2.9kg	3.6kg	2.9kg
Sound	RealTek HD	RealTek HD	RealTek HD	RealTek HD
Pointing device	Touch pad	Touch pad	Touch pad	Touch pad
DISPLAY				
Screen size	17in widescreen LCD	15.4in widescreen LCD	17in widescreen LCD	15.4in widescreen LCD
Graphics adaptor	Nvidia GeForce Go 7300	Nvidia GeForce Go 7600	ATI Mobility Radeon X1600	Nvidia GeForce Go 7600
Graphics outputs	D-sub, S-video, component, composite	DVI, S-video, component, composite	DVI, S-video, component, composite	DVI, S-video
Graphics memory	64MB dedicated	256MB dedicated	256MB dedicated	256MB dedicated
Native resolution	1,440x900	1,280x800	1,440x900	1,280x800
STORAGE				
Hard disk (available)	120GB (112GB)	100GB (93GB)	100GB (93GB)	120GB (110GB)
Optical drive	DVD+/-RW +/-DL	DVD+/-RW +/-DL	DVD+/-RW DL	DVD+/-RW +/-DL
Optical drive speeds	Philips SDVD 8821 (8X DVD+R, 8X DVD-R, 8X DVD+RW, 6X DVD-RW, 4X DVD+R DL, 6X DVD-R DL, 5X DVD-RAM, 24X CD-R, 24X CD-RW, 8X DVD-ROM, 24X CD-ROM)	Sony DW-Q520A (8X DVD+R, 8X DVD-R, 8X DVD+RW, 4X DVD-RW, 4X DVD+R DL, 4X DVD-R DL, 24X CD-R, 24X CD-RW, 8X DVD-ROM, 24X CD-ROM)	Sony DW-Q58A (8X DVD+R, 8X DVD-R, 8X DVD+RW, 6X DVD-RW, 4X DVD+R DL, 24X DVD-R DL, 24X CD-RW, 8X DVD-ROM, 24X CD-ROM)	LG GSA-T10N (8X DVD+R, 8X DVD-R, 8X DVD+RW, 6X DVD-RW, 4X DVD+R DL, 4X DVD-R DL, 5X DVD-RAM, 24X CD-R, 16X CD-RW, 8X DVD-ROM, 24X CD-ROM)
PORTS AND EXPANSION				
USB2 ports	4	4	4	4
FireWire	0	1	1	1
Infrared port	No	No	Yes	No
Bluetooth	Yes	No	No	No
Networking	10/100/1,000, 802.11a/b/g	10/100/1,000, 802.11b/g	10/100, 802.11a/b/g	10/100/1,000, 802.11b/g
PC Card slots	1x CardBus	1x ExpressCard/54, 1x CardBus	1x ExpressCard/54	1x ExpressCard/54, 1x CardBus
Modem	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Legacy ports	None	None	None	None
Memory card reader	SD, MMC, MS/PRO, xD, SM	SD, MMC, MS/PRO, xD, SM	SD, MMC, MS, xD	SD, MMC, MS/PRO, xD, SM
Other ports	Optical S/PDIF	None	Optical S/PDIF	None
MISCELLANEOUS				
Carrying case	No	No	No	Yes
Direct CD control	No	No	No	No
Operating system	Windows Vista Home Premium	Windows Vista Home Premium	Windows Vista Home Premium	Windows Vista Home Premium
Operating system restore option	Windows disc and restore partition	Restore disc	Windows disc	Restore partition, restore disc
Software included	CyberLink PowerProducer 3, NTI CD-Maker 7, Norton Internet Security 2006	Microsoft Works 8.5, Roxio Easy Media Creator 7, BullGuard Internet Security 5	Sonic RecordNow 7, Sonic Cineplayer 1.51	CyberLink PowerDVD 5, PowerProducer 2 Gold, Power2Go 3, PowerDirector 3
Other standard accessories	Built-in 1.3-megapixel webcam	Built-in 1.3-megapixel webcam	None	Built-in 1.3-megapixel webcam, USB mouse
Optional extras (including VAT)	None	Six-cell battery £80, additional PSU £70, three-year onsite warranty £30, Microsoft Office Basic 2007 £140	None	None
BUYING INFORMATION				
Company founded	1979	1983	1986	1986
Employees	6,000	418	85	16,000
Technical support staff	150+	82	10	9
Technical support times	9am-5pm Mon-Fri	9am-5.30pm 7 days a week	9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri	9am-5pm Mon-Fri
Parts and labour warranty	One year RTB	Two years onsite, one year RTB	Two years RTB including accidental damage	First year collect and return, second year RTB
Price including VAT	£800	£881	£881	£829
Price excluding VAT	£681	£750	£750	£706
Details	www.acer.co.uk	www.evesham.com	www.higrade.com	www.meshcomputers.com
Supplier	www.laptopsdirect.co.uk	Evesham 08701 609500	Hi-Grade 020 8532 6112	Mesh 08700 464747
Part number	LX.AWZ0X.058	726COSH	A9900-7200	M667-023UK

				
NEC	PC NEXTDAY	ROCK	SONY	TOSHIBA
Versa M360	Zoostorm 53-7701 Family Laptop	Pegasus 335 T5600	Vaio N21M/W	Satellite A100
★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★
Intel Core 2 Duo T7200	Intel Core 2 Duo T7200	Intel Core 2 Duo T5600	Intel Core Duo T2350	Intel Core 2 Duo T5500
2GHz	2GHz	1.83GHz	1.86GHz	1.66GHz
1GB	2GB	1GB	1GB	2GB
2 (1)	2 (0)	2 (0)	2 (0)	2 (0)
2GB	2GB	2GB	2GB	4GB
Phoenix	Insyde	AMI	Phoenix	Phoenix
40x360x258mm	37x397x282mm	45x323x230mm	37x364x265mm	36x360x267mm
2.8kg	3.6kg	2.2kg	2.9kg	2.7kg
RealTek HD	RealTek HD	RealTek HD	RealTek HD	RealTek HD
Touch pad	Touch pad	Touch pad	Touch pad	Touch pad
15.4in widescreen LCD	17in widescreen LCD	13.3in widescreen LCD	15.4in widescreen LCD	15.4in widescreen LCD
Intel Graphics Media Accelerator 950	ATI Mobility Radeon X1600	Intel Graphics Media Accelerator 950	Intel Graphics Media Accelerator 950	Nvidia GeForce Go 7300
D-sub	DVI, S-video, component, composite	D-sub, S-video	D-sub	D-sub, S-video
224MB shared	256MB dedicated	224MB shared	224MB shared	64MB dedicated
1,280x800	1,440x900	1,280x800	1,280x800	1,280x800
80GB (75GB)	160GB (149GB)	80GB (75GB)	100GB (93GB)	120GB (110GB)
DVD+/-RW +/-DL	DVD+/-RW +/-DL	DVD+/-RW +/-DL	DVD+/-RW +/-DL	DVD+/-RW +/-DL
Matshita UJ-850D (8X DVD+R, 8X DVD-R, 6X DVD+RW, 6X DVD-RW, 2.4X DVD+R DL, 24X CD-R, 10X CD-RW, 8X DVD-ROM, 24X CD-ROM)	TSST SN-S082D (8X DVD+R, 8X DVD-R, 8X DVD+RW, 6X DVD-RW, 6X DVD+R DL, 4X DVD-R DL, 5X DVD-RAM, 24X CD-R, 24X CD-RW, 8X DVD-ROM, 24X CD-ROM)	Sony AW-G170A (8X DVD+R, 8X DVD-R, 8X DVD+RW, 6X DVD-RW, 4X DVD+R DL, 4X DVD-R DL, 5X DVD-RAM, 24X CD-R, 24X CD-RW, 8X DVD, 24X CD-ROM)	Sony DW-G540A (8X DVD+R, 8X DVD-R, 8X DVD+RW, 4X DVD-RW, 4X DVD+R DL, 4X DVD-R DL, 24X CD-R, 24X CD-RW, 8X DVD-ROM, 24X CD-ROM)	Matshita UJ-850S (8X DVD+R, 8X DVD-R, 6X DVD+RW, 6X DVD-RW, 2.4X DVD+R DL, 24X CD-R, 10X CD-RW, 8X DVD-ROM, 24X CD-ROM)
4	4	3	2	4
0	1	1	1	1
No	Yes	No	No	No
Yes	No	No	No	No
10/100/1,000, 802.11a/b/g	10/100, 802.11a/b/g	10/100/1,000, 802.11a/b/g	10/100, 802.11b/g	10/100, 802.11a/b/g
1x CardBus	1x ExpressCard/54	1x CardBus	1x ExpressCard/34	1x CardBus
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
None	None	None	None	None
SD, MMC, MS, SM	SD, MMC, MS, xD	SD, MMC, MS	SD, MS	SD, MMC, MS, xD
Port replicator	Optical S/PDIF	None	None	None
No	No	Yes	No	No
No	No	No	No	No
Windows XP Professional Edition	Windows Vista Home Premium	Windows Vista Home Premium	Windows Vista Home Premium	Windows Vista Home Premium
Restore partition, restore disc	Windows disc	Restore partition, restore disc	Restore partition, restore disc	Restore partition, restore disc
CyberLink Power Cinema 4.0, Roxio RecordNow 7.3	Ahead Nero 7	Microsoft Works 8.5, Roxio Creator Suite 7, BullGuard Anti-virus 6.5	SonicStageCP 4.2, WinDVD 8.0 for Vaio, Roxio Easy Media Creator 9, Click to DVD 2.6, Microsoft Works 8.5	Ulead DVD MovieWriter for Toshiba, InterVideo WinDVD 5, Microsoft Works 8.5
None	Built-in digital TV tuner	USB digital TV tuner	None	None
Standard carry case £20, Kensington lock £25, port replicator £49, Six-cell battery £39	None	Upgrade to 120GB hard disk £53, upgrade to 2GB of RAM £147, Bluetooth USB module £24	None	USB port replicator with VGA £99, USB VOIP Phone £29, USB hybrid TV tuner £79, 320GB external hard disk £76
1996	1993	1992	1946	Notebook division 1985
148,540	68	Not disclosed	162,000	Not disclosed
40	17	6	40 (UK)	Not disclosed
9am-4pm Mon-Fri	9am-6pm Mon-Fri	9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat	8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri	8am-6pm Mon-Fri
One year collect and return	One year RTB	Three years collect and return	One year collect and return	One year collect and return
£775	£881	£858	£799	£800
£660	£750	£730	£637	£680
www.nec.co.uk	www.pcnextday.co.uk	www.rockdirect.com	http://vaio.sony-europe.com	www.computers.toshiba.co.uk
Misco 0800 038 8880	sales@pcnextday.co.uk	Rock 0845 688 0556	www.currys.co.uk	www.dabs.com
NNAG1701101	3353-7701	Pegasus 335 T56 CS	N21M/W	PSAARE-03G00JEN